

He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed. (1:1)

The *parshah* of *Korbanos*, sacrificial offerings mandated by Hashem to be a part of the Jewish People's service to Him, is rife with ambiguity. The *Rishonim* offer their rationale to explain and lend meaning to this service. In his *Moreh Nevuchim*, *Rambam* explains that the *korbanos* had a therapeutic effect on the Jewish People after their exposure to the idolatrous cultures in which they had lived. Egypt had elevated idol worship as to a way of life to the point that anything short of paganism was beyond rationale. The *korbanos* would balance out this perverted ideology. Notwithstanding the *Rambam's* view of *korbanos* from a historical perspective, we still pray to Hashem daily for a return to the *Bais Hamikdash* and the sacrificial service that was so much a part of the experience.

How do the *korbanos* adapt to contemporary times when idol worship, for the most part, is an anathema ridiculed by society? **Horav Nissan Alpert, zl**, offers the following explanation. He begins by noting the sequence in which the various forms of *korbanos* were presented to Moshe *Rabbeinu*. Moshe was first instructed with regard to the *Olas Nedavah*, free-willed Burnt offering. This was followed by the *Shelamim*, Peace-offering and the *Korban Chattas*, Sin-offering, brought for a sin committed unintentionally and a *Korban Asham*, Guilt-offering, brought for a sin willfully committed. One would think that the *Korbanos* would be listed from the most requisite to the free-willed, rather than the other way around. The order seems puzzling – at first glance. Those *korbanos* which are *min ha'din*, according to the law, should precede those that are *lifnim mishuras ha'din*, beyond the obligatory demands of the law. As the *Rosh Yeshivah* put it quite succinctly, "Should a person not first be concerned with paying his debts and only afterwards about giving gifts?"

Rav Alpert explains that the Torah is addressing the individual who wants to make certain that he does not commit a theft which requires him to bring a *Korban Asham*. How does one protect himself from falling into the felony of *geneivah*, theft? The way to achieve this is by setting one's sights on a higher goal, to seek to ascend that ladder whose legs are on this world, but whose pinnacle reaches the Heavens. This can be done only when one trains himself always to go beyond the letter of the law; in order to strive to act *lifnim mi'shuras ha'din*, one must strive to resemble the *Korban Olah*, Elevation/Burnt offering.

Only then is one assured that he will never be the cause of harm to his fellow man; he will never cause him even the most minute financial loss. Only then will he truly distance himself from evil. *Sof maaseh b'machashavah techillah*, the action which one ultimately performs had been preceded by a certain thought. An *Olah* is brought for the sins of thought. An improper thought obligates the individual to atone for himself with a *Korban Olah*.

The *Olah* represents one who aspires to elevate himself, to reach the Heavens while still

ensconced on earth. To achieve this, he must first focus on his thoughts, since his thoughts precede his actions. Every time an improper thought sneaks its way into his mind, he must banish it and follow up with a *Korban Olah*. Thus, the one who is offering the *Olah* is a *ben aliyah*, one who is in the process of ascending. Even if he does reach the summit, the mere fact that he has distanced himself from the earth and its earthliness is in and of itself a tremendous feat.

Under normal circumstances, when one climbs a ladder, he should look where he is going and concentrate. Ascending the spiritual ladder requires one to shut his eyes and not give any thought to this world. His thoughts should be focused only on Hashem, with his goal being the dissemination of Hashem's glory throughout the world. Torah should be his guide and mainstay.

Let us return to our initial question concerning why Moshe was informed of the voluntary offerings before he was instructed concerning the obligatory ones. Hashem was teaching him that a Jew's first priority should be self-improvement and self-elevation, so that he will not sin and be compelled to seek atonement through obligatory offerings. Rather than seeking cures for spiritual deficiencies, a Jew should focus on personal growth in *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty, thereby circumventing the opportunity for committing unintentional sins. One who is grateful for what G-d gives him will not resort to theft. A thief is an unhappy person who never seems to have enough, and, when he has enough, he does not know how to use it. The thief never takes the blame on himself. It is always someone else's fault. Indeed, he considers himself to be the victim!